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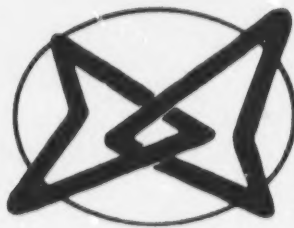
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ABSTRACT

This document examines the role that parents (especially blacks) can play in improving the quality of their children's education. The ideas are discussed from the viewpoint and experiences of a technical assistance specialist of the Documentation and Technical Assistance Project (DTA), who was primarily involved in encouraging parental participation in the Chicago public schools. The first part of the paper presents a speech in which the author, speaking at a Parent Council meeting in Chicago's District 21, explores how black parents can reinforce their children's learning at home and be more than marginally involved in school academic and non-academic activities. The second part discusses the influences of both black and majority cultures on the education and achievement of blacks; stresses the need for parents to assert themselves in helping to solve educational problems; identifies types of parental experiences that have implications for children's education; and outlines roles that parents can play in school improvement, including serving as tutors and classroom assistants, locating resources for the classroom and for special programs, conducting neighborhood field trips, and developing parent group networks. (MJL)

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"YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A STAR..."

THE NATURAL ROLE OF PARENTS AS TEACHERS

Carl R. Boyd

August 1977

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Documentation and Technical Assistance in Urban Schools Project (DTA) is an effort to learn more about how to make urban public schools work better for urban students. Toward this end, DTA combines educational research and practice within one project. DTA's mandate has three inter-related parts:

DOCUMENTATION - to study, using primarily ethnographic techniques, the ways in which selected urban schools organize themselves to solve problems. Documentation focuses upon nine sites throughout the country selected and funded by NIE to continue to engage in locally initiated improvement activities.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE - to develop in practice specific strategies which are designed to improve urban public schooling. Technical assistance strategies are based in part upon documentation of useful practices in the nine funded sites.

LINKAGE - to increase understanding, through observation of DTA's attempts to link documentation with technical assistance, of the processes through which research can be useful to practice, and practice can influence research.

Our work is designed to effect school improvement through direct work in urban public schools and through sharing what we learn with the following audiences: parents, teachers, and administrators of urban public schools; the educational research community; groups or agencies working to assist urban schools; policy makers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with deepest gratitude that I acknowledge the aid and support - in the preparation of this paper and the events discussed - of the following people:

Frances Holliday, Chicago Region Director, who contributed ideas and support; and, who provided the conceptual framework - building on the cultural strengths of Black students - for region work and much of this paper.

Barbara Stewart who was technical assistance specialist in the Chicago Region before I became her partner in November 1976. Barbara was helpful in supplying information and demonstrating techniques used in providing teachers, students, parents, and administrators with technical assistance.

Yvonne King who provided linkage information and for providing opportunities (and methodologies) for "utilizing knowledge" from sites and other regions.

Dorothy Williams and Jewell Starns, the newest additions to the Chicago Region. Dorothy has given energy and insight into educational program development, and, as administrative assistant, Jewell has typed, researched, made suggestions and lent support to the development of this paper.

Thanks, also, to Ilena Crushshon and Sylvia Mills for inspiration and support at the time I was doing the work upon which this paper is based.

Thanks to Tom Wilson, DTA Project Director, for writing the introduction to this paper - just one of the demonstrations of his knowledge of and sensitivity to region issues and technical assistance work.

Much appreciation to Hannah Meara for positive suggestions on both form and content; and to Sarah Marter for locating and notating resources helpful to the completion of this work.

Gloria Spann has worked tirelessly on the typewriter locating words and phrases between words and phrases and in the margins of the margins, as she made this paper look like a paper. Thanks Gloria!

In District 21 I have been assisted in many ways by District 21 Superintendent, Jack Mitchell and his Instructional Support Staff, especially Josephine Logan who helped me to get involved with District 21 parents.

The District 21 Parent Education Council president, Gwen Cosby, has been supportive and has suggested ways to address students' parents. Elouise Flory, principal of Ross School is always cooperative and innovative.

Special thanks to Barbara Fennell in New York whose ideas and activities have been used in my work and my paper, and to Mmes. Lillian Grayson, Annie Lee Carroll, Gladys Bennett, Iona Bell, and Mr. Daniel Kendricks for having me speak at their schools.

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Foreword

This paper by Carl Boyd who worked as a Technical Assistant Specialist in our assistance work in Chicago Public Schools aims to present rather fully his thoughts and experience with regard to his work. A major part of his work has been to encourage parents to become involved in improving the quality of the educational experience of their children. A transcript of a speech which he gives to encourage parental involvement in schools follows his preface. The speech is followed by a presentation of the issues that Carl saw as important as he composed and gave the speech.

This paper represents an early attempt to work with more varied forms of written communication in keeping with our DTA charge to find new ways of supporting practitioners with ideas and knowledge. We think varied ways of describing what we do and think are necessary for that purpose. Most research publication formats are appropriate to communicate certain central values and interests of researchers. We believe the format of the present paper is appropriate to communicate the perspective of a practitioner of methods for solving problems in urban public schools.

We welcome comments from readers not only on the ideas contained in this paper, but also on this method of presentation.

Thomas A. Wilson,
Project Director

PREFACE

The household is the smallest unit of the family, consisting of the children, parents, and sometimes grandparents. It is what one might call "The family at night," for it is generally at night the parents are with their immediate children in the same house; they discuss private affairs of their household, and the parents educate the children...(p. 140)

This brief excerpt from theologian, John S. Mbiti's book, African Religions and Philosophy, illustrates the teaching role assumed by parents in African families. Mbiti also states that:

The deep sense of kinship, with all it implies, has been one of the strongest forces in traditional African life.... It is kinship which controls social relationships between people in a given community.....it determines the behavior of one individual towards another (p. 135).

As kinship and parental guidance are important in African culture, so are they important in African American culture.

This is a paper which deals with the need for and demonstration of parental involvement in their children's education, particularly in urban schools. The focus is upon Chicago's Public School District 21 and the Center for New Schools' Documentation and Technical Assistance Project.

"You Don't Have To Be A Star..."

Parental Involvement In Schools

Presentation

by

Carl R. Boyd

Chicago Public School District 21

Parent Council Meeting

DISTRICT 21 PARENTS COUNCIL MEETING
FRIDAY, MAY 6, 1977 - 9:30 A.M.

(Reading, not out of disrespect, but because I have a time limit and I don't want to leave out anything)

There is a hit record out popularized by Marilyn McCoo and Billy Davis, and I'm using the title of that tune to express views that I have on parental involvement in the schools in the education of your child. The name of that record and this presentation is, "You Don't Have To Be A Star To Be In My Show" - You Don't Have To Be A Star To Be In My Show.

The reason I put it this way is because so often parents - members of your local school councils - perhaps even some of you, often reflect the feeling that you'd like to become involved, but you're not sure what to do - you're not sure you can do worthwhile things to enhance the learning atmosphere at your child's school.

That questioning; that reluctance to assert yourself; that uncertainty bothers me, because it results in parents forgetting that above the classroom teacher, above the school principal, above the superintendent, the parent is the child's first, main teacher. The result is that some Local School Councils principal activities are selling baked goods and contributing Christmas decorations to holiday assemblies. The result is communities allowing for, sometimes even asking for a kind of standard instructional approach from the school, when there are peculiarities in every community that only community folks can know about; and rather than offend or intimidate the school principle and teachers, you help them when you express your knowledge, your concerns, and your willingness to play an active part in improving upon any factors which influence the educational atmosphere in your neighborhood. I certainly don't mean to say that Local School Councils should not have bake sales - bake sales raise

funds and very few innovative programs can be initiated and implemented without funds. I am not saying that bake sales are not creative - there are creative approaches to bake sales, and other fund raising activities. I'm saying that it is not the most creative thing that can be done to develop a cooperative relationship between the community and the school. I'm saying that there are schools and councils represented here that are more effective than others represented here in finding ways to impact the instructional program at school as well as the social programs. I'm saying that as parents you are proving your creativity every day as you bring up a family in the City of Chicago - not an easy task. And, as you are creative - as you are your child's number one teacher - as your local council is more effective than others, you can - you must assert yourselves and teach, you must share information and enthusiasm with others that they might be as effective as you. You must see yourself as important, in your child's education, you must see your council as important to the school your children attend. You must start with yourself - "You Don't Have To Be A Star To Be In This Show." A very simple example of your being teacher at home can be seen at dinner time.

- You teach math and home economics when you teach children to make out a grocery list, appreciating food prices and quantity for a family of a certain size;
- You teach reading and math when you allow them to follow recipes;
- You teach family living as you determine whose turn it is to cook, to wash dishes, to go to the store;
- Your children learn as they divide the cake into fours, as they set the table for four;
- there is teaching and learning taking places as they use the senses of sight, touch, smell and taste to know what's for dinner;

- as they realize that liquids are poured and solids are placed;
- that glasses and dishes break, that pots and pans make noise;
- that foods change forms in the coking process, and on and on.

And you teach that in your home. You know more about your child than the teacher knows, and you must cooperate by letting the teacher know what you know and continuing - beyond cooking - to teach your child at home. Your Local School Council knows more about your community than the school does and you must cooperate by letting principals and teachers know what you know, by learning what they know, and working together to solve any problems existing in and around the school.

District 21 is a Black school district. Whatever the Federal Government and the Board of Education say they're "getting ready" to do, right now more than 98% of the students in District 21 are Black. And, as Black parents you are familiar with peculiarities in our community that can be emphasized to help our youngsters learn. At the Center for New Schools we call it Building On Cultural Strengths - meaning, being aware of that which is peculiar to Blacks in positive ways and using it to the advantage of the learning situation.

- It is a Black behavioral pattern for the older child to assume responsibility for the care and teaching of the younger children in the Black home - we call it family - in the school it's called peer tutoring.
- It is a part of the Black experience for children to assume some responsibility for what they want to learn and do at an early age and being allowed to choose freely, different activities - some say it's too much freedom - we call it growing up - in the school it's called open education.
- Black cultural strengths include being creative: as necessity is the mother of invention, Black youngsters

have made playgrounds out of vacant lots, baseball bats out of broomsticks, and musical instruments out of cereal boxes and rubber bands - and while this speaks to our propensity for athletics and entertainment, being creative is important in all aspects of life and offers the school and the community a variety of approaches to solving the reading, writing, arithmetic problems of the Black student.

- Cultural strengths of the Black student are emphasized in the home as youngsters are expected to assume adult responsibilities at a young age - as has been true in African cultures for centuries. These same cultural strengths can be emphasized in the school in cooperation with the home.

Unfortunately, we have seen, and are seeing the natural tendency for our youngsters to act adult, manifest itself in negative ways - as Black parents loosen the reins on the children, the youngsters emulate role models sensationalized by T.V., movies, neighborhood gangs, pimps, prostitutes and pushers. This doesn't mean that there's something inherently wrong with the Black family lifestyle that sees youngsters making early decisions - it means that the role models are coming from the streets instead of the school. We need to launch a concerted "advertising campaign" conducted by the school and the community to get our children back - back from the streets - from the jails - from the unemployment rolls - from early pregnancies accompanied by late maturity.

We must understand and build upon our cultural strengths as diligently and unashamedly as other ethnic groups. Jewish youngsters grow up steeped in religious philosophy, tradition, and practice; Chinese youngsters grow up steeped in Chinese philosophy, traditions, and practice; Black youngsters grow up steeped in Black religious philosophy, and tradition, but not practice - we say it but we don't do it. And, as Gladys Knight sings - it's a sad song. It's a sad song if parents leave the teaching of their youngsters solely up to the teachers. It is a sad song if teachers and parents do not cooperate in meaningful ways - mutually respecting the unique

role each has in the educational upbringing of children - bright, curious, enthusiastic, honest children who turn on the television and get turned off to education because we have not gotten our thing together enough to compete with the excitement, humor, variety of the media.

It's sad if Black parents are hesitant about recognizing cultural strengths in Black youngsters - or if Black parents are waiting for the Board of Education to integrate the schools - or to think that there's something magical about integration - or if you're waiting for principals and teachers to activate local school councils. It is great to admire administrative leaders and to depend upon teachers for formal aspects of the educational guidance of the children. But, it's a sad song, indeed, if Local School Councils look to someone else to design programs that can create a cooperative atmosphere between the school and the community. No one can do it better than you, for, while the educators, the administrators, the educational "superstars" can provide leadership and guidance, they cannot organize for you or study for your children; they cannot conduct your meetings or do your child's homework; they cannot write out your agenda or pay attention in class for your sons and daughters - you and your children must do that.

The sadness is not so much in the inability of our youngsters to read books as it is in our refusal to read the signs of the times which tell us to sacrifice, to learn, to cooperate, to keep on stepping - not to get ahead of others vying for our children's attention, but just to keep up.

You are qualified to be your children's principal teacher and you are emotionally involved in the child's learning because one of our Black cultural strengths is the love of parents for their children. And, while this love for offspring is not unique among Blacks; while our love is shared by

the love of white parents for their children, and Latino parents for their children - while this cultural strength is not unique to one culture - our sad song is that we have not demonstrated this love in the form of tightening up our education, that our children will get the kind of firm foundation upon which a brighter future can be built.

But, would it be wrong to give our love one more try? Do we realize that we cannot say goodbye to our children. For as sad as it is to be frustrated in efforts to improve urban education, it's sadder to give up - it's sadder to stop trying - to stop loving - It's a sad song that says goodbye.

We can be effective in employing skills we have to encourage our children and their teachers to do better at learning and teaching. This requires no extensive preparation. It requires no impressive educational background full of degrees, A's & B's and Ph.D.'s. Your credentials are parenthood. You are qualified. You don't have to be a star. You can just come as you are.

Come as you are, Clara Rollins and Estelle Rushing, your school needs your guidance and collective energies - not super stars but diligent, concerned representatives. The ESEA District Council is lucky to have Ruby McKeever as an example of leadership born out of concern and application of skills. You don't have to be a star Sherie Grayson - you don't have to be, but you are and Wentworth realizes that.

What can parents do? You can serve as tutors, work in classrooms as parent assistants, escort visitors around your school - around Beale Upper Grade where our star, Magdeline Laurence is the representative.

Parents can investigate and provide community resources - conduct neighborhood field trips. Perhaps Priscilla Holloway knows sites of

interest around the Low community. She may not be in the papers or on T.V., but Priscilla is star enough to be the community leader that she is.

Parents are involved in the school because your children go there. You must get the schools involved in you by going there yourselves. Continue going to Kershaw, Mae Richardson, continue providing leadership at the school/community level, as well as leadership at the citywide level as a member of the desegregation committee advisory council.

Parents can provide coalitions such as represented here by the District 21 schools coming together to express concerns and share techniques and methodologies and skills and knowledge. Parents can provide broader coalitions such as that being initiated at Betsy Ross School which is becoming Sister School to School A (8)* in New York City.

No you don't have to be a star, nor do you need to wait for stars to guide you, you already have Olivia Guice and Suzette Hopkins, and Doris Yarber and Barbara Jones and Gwen Cosby, and many others.

Parents, attend meetings, encourage others to do the same, express concerns, contact local businesses for financial and material support for special programs, donate materials you have to classrooms, post notices of interesting events, be assertive, but not without being willing to learn. We are not stars, we're concerned about our children, about our future and their future. We don't have to be stars for that.

And I am thankful that I didn't have to be a star to share these thoughts with you today.

Thank You,

Carl R. Boyd

*School A is one of several schools being studied by the Documentation Team of the DTA project. A pseudonym has been applied in order to preserve anonymity. The number in parenthesis indicates the site number.

"You Don't Have To Be A Star..."
The Natural Role of Parents as Teachers

**A Technical Assistance Specialist's Perspective
on His Work**

Introduction

In Chicago, Illinois the Center for New Schools' Documentation and Technical Assistance Project works with District 21 parents, teachers, and administrators to discover, develop, and implement problem solving techniques in urban education. The student population in District 21 - the Englewood community - is over 99% Black.

"You Don't Have To Be A Star To Be In My Show..."

In a recent series of lectures to District 21 parents, I discussed parent participation within the context of a speech entitled, after the name of a currently popular record, "You Don't Have To Be A Star To Be In My Show." In this paper I discuss, briefly, the speech and audience reactions as an introduction to the rationale for inspiring the Black parent to build on strengths, and offering those parents technical assistance to reach desirable goals in urban education.

The rationale precedes the search for answers and the reason I feel that parents are most important in the process of improving urban education. Included are examples of organized programs (DTA research), the plight of Black families and the need for parent leadership; and, our optimism in the Chicago Region about the future of District 21 parents serving as models for parent involvement in the near future.

First, The Intent of My Speech

The thrust of my message was that by virtue of being parents, members of the groups to whom I spoke had rights and responsibilities in public schools - in public schooling - inherent in having children in attendance

at the schools. Drawing from the perspective of building on cultural strengths of the Black family projected by Chicago Region Director, Dr. Frances Holliday (1977), using information from NIE funded sites, and having a firm belief that parents are children's foremost teachers, I tried to convince my audiences that they are equipped with the necessary skills, talents, and materials to become agents of change in the public school system, now, without special preparation.

I use this personal experience to relate the reactions to my "Ycu Don't Have To Be A Star..." speech (included in the introduction of this paper) and the implications thereof. My words were greeted with enthusiastic applause. While making points on cultural strengths and the parent as teacher I saw smiles and nods of agreement, parents echoing the words and phrases to each other as they seemed to be reawakened to simple truths. I was invited to give that same speech four more times in District 21. It is not modesty that reveals to me that my charisma, deep voice, good looks, and stage presence were not the cause of the parents' enthusiasm. (If I had to depend upon that I might impress one or two members of my family - if they were being especially kind that day.) The cordial response was prompted by the parents' identifying with ideas and concepts put forth.

Parents think of themselves as teachers. Every warning they give children - from cautioning them about crossing the street to being careful about "the crowd they run with" - confirms that. Every reward they give for cleaning up the room, or getting good grades, or being nice to little brothers and sisters, confirms that. The parent-as-teacher feeling is confirmed every time a parent tells a child which bus to take, which situation to avoid, which outfit to wear, which food to eat. The role of the parent as teacher is played (though certainly not in the recreational or dramatic sense) every

time and as long as the parent relates to the child. Parents lecture, discuss, reward, punish, reiterate, inspire, encourage, tutor, conduct field trips, and, even when they are unaware of being observed they are exemplars. When a parent is not a teacher she is not a parent for they go hand-in-hand, naturally.

CNS Works to Improve Urban Education

A Rationale

As the work of the Chicago Region is undergirded by the belief in the ability of Black youngsters to learn and the knowledge that parent groups are powerful when organized and assertive; and seeks to build upon the cultural strengths of the Black family (the African American race), the approach to helping solve the parent involvement problem in Black schools is to convince parents that their natural role as household leaders entitles them to (demands that they) shape the course of their children's learning; thus, shaping their future. This approach encourages the discovery of (or re-discovery) of the strengths in the Black lifestyle and asserts that significant participation, from the cultural strengths perspective requires no special skills peculiar to traditional white middle class orientated education. In fact, the constant attempt to assimilate into the American mainstream by grappling with curricula designed to perpetuate an inferior self-image is one of the main factors in keeping Black people confused and behind. One example of the perpetuation of an inferior self-image group among Blacks in curricular design is the inflexibility of standard English. While Black jazz musicians, athletes, and scholars have contributed much to America's slang vocabulary, the Black student is criticized and academically penalized for using "peculiar" terminology in school - indeed, grammatically

inferior terminology - (except for purposes of illustration) though educators are aware of the fact that such language is comfortable and communicative for the Black child and others.

In the book, Compensatory Education for the Disadvantaged by Edmund W. Gordon and Doxey A. Wilkerson (1966), The California Advisory Committee in Compensatory Education is quoted as having reported that:

They ("disadvantaged" students) tend to lack in the social experiences which our present school curriculums assume to be common to all students. This means that their experiences in the society are marked by sharp differences from the "normal" or "regular" pattern assumed by the middle-class oriented school. Their motivation may be inappropriate to normal school achievement or success. That is, they may display a sense of failure or lack of drive. They often have been subjected to values and expectations which tend to generate conflict between themselves and the school.

Even as the report shows insight, the language (disadvantaged, inappropriate, failure) has a negative orientation.

As American Blacks struggle with public education, urban schools with large numbers of Black students, continue to see high dropout rates and low achievement scores. The Blacks who "make it" (in school and in subsequent life) are lauded, not only for their accomplishments, but also because they are among the few: the few who have persevered, the few who have worked extra hard, the few who understand the society in which we live and the need to adopt and practice its standards for success - or, at least, survival. And, while this few is ever increasing, the relationship of that number to those who remain behind (i.e., the unemployed, miseducated, discouraged) is so disproportionate that African Americans feel that their plight is no better now than it was in the days of slavery - in fact, in some quarters, worse.

It was President Kennedy (cited in Bennett, 1969) who said in 1963:

The Negro baby born in America today, regardless of the section or state in which he is born has about one-half as much chance of completing high school as a white baby born in the same place on the same day, one-third as much chance of becoming a professional man, twice as much chance of becoming unemployed, about one seventh as much chance of earning \$10,000 a year-a life expectancy which is seven years less-and the prospects of earning only half as much (p. 329).

More recently, Professor Andrew F. Brimmer, in a 1976 report written for the National Commission for Manpower Policy, Washington, D.C., states:

Although Blacks made substantial progress during the 1960's in obtaining clerical and sales jobs and also registered noticeable gains as craftsmen-their occupational center of gravity remained anchored in those positions requiring little skill and offering few opportunities for further advancement (p. 17).

Public education should not reproduce our society by making it necessary for minority group members to have to work harder than majority group members to learn how to survive in America. Instead, public schools should become places where mutations occur. Yet, public schools get poor grades when it comes to assuring all citizens equal opportunities, through education, to function successfully in the 'mainstream' of our society. Public education - especially in urban schools - faces many problems: vandalism, overcrowding, poorly qualified instructors, but none is more severe than its failure to meet the needs (primarily, educational, but also social and economic) of minority students.

America boasts of success due to her constitution (one of the longest standing governing documents in the world), her democratic principles, her fine leadership, and a mainstream population that sees justice prevail even through trying times. Mainstream Americans refuse to admit that America has failed miserably in the treatment of Indians, Spanish-speaking citizens, Blacks, and poor whites.

WE KNOW THE PROBLEM

In a capitalistic system which thrives on a large consumer population; on technology so advanced that it can build machinery (cars, appliances, etc.) so "well" that its life span coincides with the economy's need to sell some more machinery; and on a few high income folks who have 1001 ways to get tax breaks, who is to teach the masses, (the tired, the hungry, the poor) the minorities, how to significantly change their lot - and, in so doing change (upset) the economy?

WHO/WHAT/WHERE IS THE ANSWER?
WHO IS TO IDENTIFY AND SOLVE THE PROBLEMS OF MINORITY STUDENTS?

Teachers?

Teachers often do not want to identify the public school problem(s) because they might see themselves facing their own accusatory finger. As educators they teach what they've been taught, the way they've been taught, they perpetuate a system which turns out such a high percentage of failures that any private enterprise with a similar record of lack of production would long-since have gone out of business.

Other teachers are so insecure as to believe that if they identify real problems and become honest and innovative, they will lose their jobs for "rocking the boat", never considering whether it is better to rock the boat to keep it afloat than to teach without thinking while the boat keeps sinking. And of course, there are teachers who are poorly prepared, or "in it" (teaching) for the hours and vacation, or have little sensitivity to the needs of children whoever, whatever they are. There are good, dedicated teachers; but they seem to be few and almost ineffectual in comparison with those who are insecure, ill-prepared, and insensitive. Therefore, it would seem unwise - impractical to seek significant solutions from those who are so much a part of the problem.

Students?

While in school, minority students are hard pressed to solve their own educational problems because, often, they cannot figure out what the problem is until they've left school. During their school years, students are busy figuring out problems rather than the problem. They are intimidated by teachers, administrators and the system to the extent that they dare not be vocal when they think they've figured out what's wrong. Usually the student draws the conclusion that his failure results from something being wrong with him and, consequently, drops out of school or hardly participates when in attendance. The reason this syndrome is particularly harmful to minority students is because the same intimidating - failing image has been put upon their race and, as their people stay on the low rung of the economic/educational/social ladder, their conclusion is "confirmed" and their lifestyle is shaped according to that negative stereotype.

Many teachers do not see the repetitive regression because of their closeness to the situation ("...the forest for the trees"); so, they, too, blame the students for their "inability to learn," and continue day after day, year after year to use the same methods, procedures, subject matter, system(s), insisting that the youngsters study harder and longer so concepts will finally "sink in."

Administrators?

Administrators: principals, superintendents, department heads are very often the intimidators (of teachers and students) who have gotten their positions by not "making waves" and "rocking the boats", and therefore, though in positions of some power dare not become too innovative lest they be transferred or "promoted" to a position of impotence.

In Chicago, two incidents might be cited: In 1972, Barbara Sizemore, a school principal, long noted - since the 1960's - for her "revolutionary approach to the teaching of Black children" found herself, because of her approach to teaching, "hidden away in a Chicago Board of Education bureaucratic cubicle." In 1976, Chicago Public Schools District 9 Superintendent, Al Briggs, announced publicly that elementary students in District 9 intending to graduate must be reading at or on the sixth grade level or above. His statement received great press and was lauded by many parents, educators, and critics of the school system. It is now 1977, and more than 600 students were refused diplomas because of low reading scores; and, while many who praised Mr. Briggs when he made his announcement, reiterated that praise when he enforced it, the General Superintendent of Chicago Schools, Dr. Joseph Hannon, would not support the action of his District 9 superintendent. Though Al Briggs was not transferred or shifted, the non-support of Chicago's school boss, is a true indication of why administrators are careful not to be too assertive.

Parents?

Who, then might best solve educational problems? Who can give courageous and far-thinking administrators and teachers, the support they need to be assertive, creative, unorthodox and even rebellious? Parents, the best single group to bring about change in the schools. Schools serve the community: The community at large/the local community where they exist, and parent participation in school programs is the key to successful change where change is needed; and it's sorely needed in many public schools.

Parents must become assertive inside the school and at home in efforts to significantly affect children's learning.

SOME PARENTS ARE ASSERTIVE AND EFFECTIVE

There are examples of parental involvement in schools which illustrate how effective education can be with parents' assistance. In Los Angeles, California at Miramonte School (enrollment 1,500; two-thirds Latino, one-third Black, low economic class community) the Local School Council, once established after a history of disorganization, showed the "power of parents" almost immediately. As Faris (1976) reports:

For example, when parents objected to a teacher's language and attitude toward children, there were meetings with council, and with the principal, and the teacher was finally transferred. When Mexican-Americans began coming into the school community, the council saw a need for a Spanish class for English-speaking people and petitioned for it. The council also moved in a similar fashion to get more ESL (English as a second language) classes and more aides to assist teachers in the school...The council confronted the staff over implementation of Early Childhood Education programs in the school. At the council's insistence the reluctant staff initiated the program (pp. 72-74).

President David C. Knapp (cited in Adams, 1976) describes the Madison (Connecticut) Educational Forum in the following way:

Was started in 1970 by newcomers eager to reverse the trend to austerity budgeting...The Forum set out to publicize what the schools needed and to get support for it. The Madison Education Forum may attain its objective of a sound, balanced educational system within a few years. We got eight of the seventeen personnel we requested in the recent budget. We're getting a music teacher in every school, a physical education teacher in every school, and a string music program (p. 141).

In River City (6)* Washington School is run by the Washington Neighborhood School Board, a policy making group comprised of parents, teachers and the principal, Ned Winter. The president is a parent and the decision making power (including hiring teachers and determining curriculum) is in

*Site names and names of participants in the sites are pseudonyms. Numbers in parentheses indicate site numbers. Often sites are known by several different names, thus the numbers should provide clear identification.

the hands of the parents. At a recent meeting (attended by the author 2/8/77) there was a discussion concerning special education teachers meeting with their supervisors and parents. The school principal, Ned Winter, felt that time would be saved if the teachers met with parents and their supervisors at the same time. The parents felt that they could be more candid with observations and questions put to the teachers if the special education supervisors were not present. Ned made strong points in favor of his argument, as the WNSB had a heavy schedule and could benefit by time saved. But, because of the parents' "political" strength Winter was overruled and the interviews were conducted as the parents wished.

There are many examples to illustrate how things get done when parents organize and assert themselves. There are principals who admit (even brag about) the fact that they have advised parents to make demands in order that the principal can act on a controversial/untraditional/expensive program due to "community pressure." When parents become involved in the school's program, in an organized way, also they are not only within their rights, they are usually successful.

THE PLIGHT, THE RIGHT, THE RESPONSIBILITY OF BLACK PARENTS

Now it would seem logical that if parents have the right to be active in their children's education, and if organized groups are usually successful; and, further, if urban schools are in trouble, that they would simply organize and solve the school's problems. It is not quite that simple - especially for minority parents - primarily because of parents themselves. The DTA Chicago Region team has found that Black parents are as victimized as Black youngsters by the "intimidating/failing" mind set because they came from the institutions (and institutionalized stereotypes) their children presently confront, thus, the parents, themselves, hold themselves back.

Parents feel that teachers know more about teaching than lay parents because teachers have gone to school, and because teachers claim to know more. Pediatricians, psychologists, and other "experts" taking advantage of today's "book-boom" author child-rearing techniques which intimidate parents who lack confidence. (The parents fail to realize that many authors get their ideas from the very parents they advise.) Too many parents forget how strongly they were influenced by their own parents; and, how unnecessary it was to see Mama's name in print or Daddy in front of a classroom to learn valuable lessons from them.

Parents are naturally teachers, and must teach. The future of our society rests heavily on the progress of minorities. In efforts to protect the economy, America has neglected the minorities. The result of that neglect is lack of participation in the capitalistic system. Suddenly there is concern about welfare rolls swelling and an unstimulated economy.

Education can help; but not that education which perpetuates the problem. School systems must not go blindly ahead "teaching" antiquated middle class standards and concepts while larger numbers of folks fall behind, creating more educational and economic problems. And minority parents must gain confidence in their abilities to positively impact the educational situation.

Parents need to orient children in the direction of success in terms of achievement, pride in heritage, high ideals. Minorities are affected in a more negative way by the very fact that we are minorities (something less than...). While we may intellectually assert that minority is, by definition, a group that is quantitatively less than another group, we realistically realize that the connotation associated with the term has far more impact than numbers reveal.

Parents must be teachers in order to protect their children from the society as well as prepare them to live in it. And, parents must know enough to understand that both the preparation and protection can exist simultaneously. It is natural for the parents to teach this protection/preparation lesson because they are sensitive to and concerned about their children, and because they understand, having had the benefit of much experience in the system, the tremendous need for protection and preparation AND CHANGE.

The reason that District 21 parents were so receptive to the idea of their being their children's teachers seemed to be because that role has been and continues to be taken from them. Today's parents "compete" with television, movies, sporting events, and other powerful recreational activities, for the child's attention. Even when the activities are shared, and families go to drive-ins and movies together, the "free" expression and the promotion of freedom (i.e., independence) to which youngsters are exposed through entertainment media, too often makes a greater impression on children than the parents. School personnel insist that they are not policemen nor parents, but teachers continue to try to be both. Teachers are rewarded for acting like parents (establishing "rapport"), and controlling classes like police (maintaining "discipline"). Peer influences on youth seem heavier than ever, perhaps because television, pre-school "academics", advanced toys, and more literate parents have youngsters communicating with each other on a fairly sophisticated level at an earlier age than ever.

The external forces acting upon children to replace the parent as the child's number one teacher are far more harmful to the minority family than to the white middle class, towards whom educational institutions gear subject matter and teaching methods; for, even as teachers and texts appear to try

to help the situation, they speak in terms of "catching up", "assimilating", "overcoming."

Most Black parents have had experience with credit; the need to establish it; the use of credit cards; the agony of falling behind and having a white middle class collector "bug" them on the phone about payments. District 21 parents can identify with that, understand the ramifications, and teach their children how to keep an A-1 rating and use the system to improve their plight.

School curricula don't say much about this. Black parents do, naturally, because it's so much a part of our daily existence, and a subject they must teach. Most Black parents have dealt with currency exchanges where insensitive cashiers check several pieces of identification and phone their place of employment before being told that they "cannot cash that check here." School curricula don't say a lot about currency exchanges vs. banks for transacting financial business. Black parents do, naturally, because they use currency exchanges more than middle class whites, and it is subject matter they must teach.

Black families have only, lately, (the last couple of decades) been exposed to tax shelters, investments, major insurance, annuities; and they learned those things from each other, from Black insurance agents and from parents. Even as we realize that structures of the different economic concepts have been set up by whites and taught by whites, Blacks have had to learn to adapt the principles to the peculiarities of the Black experience.

Using credit cards for cash and currency exchanges for banking services are but two examples of the lack of economic sophistication peculiar to families unaccustomed to managing money. Minority families fit into this category more readily than majority families because minority parents cannot

leach, by example, how to deal with money they do not have. Therefore, Black parents of today must teach children how to deal with urban economics much like Black parents before them taught children how to deal with rural segregation. Blacks have been guided by 'mother wit', instinct, street education, recall (of the original role of Blacks in America), combined with formal education. The natural role of the parent as teacher has been the norm in Black communities. Only in the last few decades - since the mass migration from close rural communities to crowded, impersonal urban areas - have Blacks gotten away from the practice of relating directly the church to the school and both to the home.

The struggle to survive in this "alien" environment saw Black parents depending more and more on institutions - particularly the school - to rear their children. The dependence upon the teachers to teach, discipline, and inspire the child comes from the image of the school when it was truly an extension of the home (in Black southern life). But, urban schools are large and white middle class orientated. Urban life is fast and impersonal. Urban school systems spend lots of time and energy surviving economically by producing numerous reports (statistics, innovations, special programs, personnel policies and practices, attendance reports, building inspections, textbook counts, etc.) - paper work for the bureaucracy. As the systems' appropriations (money) depend upon reports more so than student's achievements, teachers as well as administrators become report-conscious. There is little time for the "personal touch." When parents do not guide their children's education, the children are left to guide themselves. Even school counselors, whose job it is to direct students, are overloaded with paper work. The external forces mentioned earlier (movies, TV, peers, hit records, etc.) take hold, and suddenly we wonder 'what's become of our children?' What's become of our children is parents - or the absence of

parents. Black parents are swept up on the whirlwind of an urban tornado, travelling in circles trying frantically to catch up with an economic system, represented by the business community, that promises comfortable living, someday, for Blacks, while catering to the white upper class. In the whirlwind, white middle class Americans who are doing just well enough to be threatened by minorities, want to maintain the status quo to assure that their children will be guaranteed jobs and thus be able to inherit some semblance of security.

Add to that a political system which controls education (through appropriations and legislation) while depending upon white middle class votes and taxes. The teachers are, then, trying (?) to fill the needs of Black parents while perpetuating the very system which holds them back.

All of those "tornado-swept" entities claim to desire "better" education for the minority student, but each is so swept up in their own thing that the focus is misdirected.

Consequently, in the eye of the torado, in the vacuum, is the urban minority student, aware that a tornado is surrounding him, but not knowing what roles are being played. He can either step out of the eye and become a part of his own generation's whirlwind (a future struggling parent), or he can create a tornado of his own (rebellling against society, becoming crime oriented, living off of the government, or trying to get lucky, through athletics or entertainment, in order to become middle class and forget the past).

Even when Black parents reach something like economic comfort, they will never be middle class whites and control politics and the schools. Black parents must get out of the whirlwind - the rat race - the quest to become imitation whites - and begin to teach cultural concepts to their

own children, while supplementing through home tutoring and reinforcement - the public schools readin', 'ritin', 'rithmetic curricula.

No one else is going to step into the eye of the storm; they feel that it's too dangerous, and they are too busy creating it.

First, the parent must realize that impacting their children's education is the number one priority for the preservation of whatever future Blacks have in America, and must make a commitment to do so. Then parents must understand - by whatever means necessary, through research, recall, discussion, observation, study - what their children need to learn. When parents begin to question their ability to teach because they have not graduated from college, or perhaps, from high school, they are forgetting how valuable their parenthood education, and cultural lifestyle have been.

Parents in minority communities have a vested interest. Vandalism, drug dealing, hat wearing, assaults on teachers have become more prevalent than ever in public schools. While it may be true that we cannot expect teachers to solve school problems because of their allegiance to "the system" or fear for their jobs, it is equally true that we cannot expect teachers to police drug traffic or discipline delinquents.

The failure of inner city schools rests largely upon inadequate instruction and guidance and the insensitivity of the school and political systems to minorities; but much of the failure is also attributable to illdisciplined youth - even when their actions are reactions to institutionalized neglect.

Some of the revolutionary rhetoric of the sixties created an atmosphere among young Blacks which made them feel comfortable in excusing failure on the basis of discrimination. Some of the radicalism created an atmosphere wherein young Blacks felt that anything defiant was revolutionary.

It is the parent's responsibility to interpret the difference between a clenched fist during the singing of the Black National Anthem and a clenched fist during a gang fight. Parents must clarify the issues concerned with defying a legality which keeps us from voting and defying a legality which keeps us from purchasing and selling dope.

Parents must help to discipline the child's mind and spirit at home so the teacher does not have to discipline the child in school. Lives most affected by an individual's actions are those in his immediate environment - first his family, then his friends, his neighbors . . . then, perhaps, his teachers. Therefore, it is more important for his friends, and most important for his family to guide the "wayward" student in the direction of sound moral values as well as practical, progress-oriented learning. The heads of the family are the parents and, consequently, parents have the responsibility and the "vested interest", if you will, (from the standpoint of family reputation, solidarity, economics, future) that makes it essential for them to get their children together.

Parents are surprised (shocked/appalled) when marijuana is found on the persons of their children, though they live with them everyday; but, parents will not accept such "shock" from teachers when they discover that the child cannot read, though they've shared the same classroom five days a week. ("The teacher should've known!?!") Parents will press charges and file suits if a teacher assaults their child, though they are not familiar with the circumstances. The same parent will defend the child after he assaults a teacher, though unfamiliar with the circumstances.

Parents must realize that children wear hats in school if they wear them in the house. Parents know that children are disrespectful in school if they are disrespectful and undisciplined at home.

The breakdown in schools reflects the breakdown of the community and the homes which make up that community. In Black neighborhoods - in cities with large Black populations - the community/family breakdown is foreign to African tradition; and parents must teach and enforce unity in keeping with the heritage of Black people.

In his paper 'African Root and American Fruit', Dr. Wade W. Nobles discussed Black family unity and the community ("survival of the tribe") in this way:

This, the "notion of unity", coupled with the principle of the "survival of the tribe" determines a particular, if not unique, approach to the pragmatical function of Black families. First of all, they suggest that whatever is necessary to maintain and insure the survival of the unit is proper and acceptable; and congruently anything antagonistic to its survival is not acceptable or proper.

Vandalism, drug dealing, teacher assaults, gang fights, disrespect for learning are (at least) antagonistic to the "survival of the tribe", and must be reconciled by the tribe - the family being the main unit in the community.

REALISTIC OPTIMISM IN DISTRICT 21

If and when parents can be convinced of their worth, purpose and power, it is thought that they will take on the challenge of a failing educational system and help to provide for new life and new directions in urban schools - with the parent assuming a major role in the teaching of children outside of the classroom.

In order to do this effectively, parents must work in cooperation with teachers, but as much more than cake-bakers and raffle ticket sellers.

I was surprised and pleased when Josephine Logan, Human Relations Specialist with the District 21 office, indicated that several parents from

different local school councils had come together to use excerpts from my speech to develop proposals on parent intervention for their children's school principals. They were determining what they wanted from the schools as parents representing other parents.

The District 21 Parent Educational Council parents have demonstrated, more than once, their ability to move in an organized and effective way to accomplish tasks and reach goals.

When Jack Mitchell, District 21 Superintendent, received the Chicago Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa's "Educator of the Year" Award, June 3, 1976, it was the result of a strong Parent Council thrust almost as much as it was Mr. Mitchell's qualifications. Josephine Logan, read about the award very near the deadline for submitting candidates. Without letting Mr. Mitchell know it, Josephine took the information to the District 21 Parent Education Council and to the schools (there are 18 elementary and 2 high schools in District 21). The parent group and the schools - teachers and students - wrote letters and solicited endorsements quickly enough to meet the deadline and convincingly enough to help make Jack Mitchell the unanimous choice by Phi Delta Kappa members for the 1976 Educator of the Year.

The District 21 Parent Education Council members cooperate in crises as well as celebrations. Since working with them - beginning in November, 1976, when I became T.A. Specialist with the DTA Project, Chicago Region - I have seen them take on a legal issue (the case concerning community review as requisite for hiring principals), a board policy problem (dealing with declaring a replacement school a new school to allow the principal to recruit new staff), a curriculum case (helping to determine how a new school could best meet the needs of District 21 children), and a logistics problem (as schools close, students must find new schools without causing overcrowding).

The President of the District 21 Parent Education Council Gwen Cosby, has exchanged information with the president of River City's (6) Washington Neighborhood School Board, Pearl Monroe. They plan to continue exchanging information and visits to each other's meetings. Through the parents, Betsy Ross School in Chicago has become Sister School to School A (8) in New York.

There are all sorts of variations on the parents-as-teachers theme, and District 21 has every opportunity to create the model which sets such direction. As a council, the District 21 parents are very effective. They do not boast of being comprised of "superstars." But, then, "you don't have to be a star" to be concerned and industrious.

Parents can:

- serve as tutors*
- work as classroom assistants*
- investigate community resources for special programs*
- conduct neighborhood field trips*
- develop coalitions/networks among parent groups*
- donate materials to classrooms*
- attend meetings*
- develop information/resource centers for parents and teachers
- research and distribute information on parents' rights in their children's education
- exchange "study hours" in each others homes with quiet and refreshments - for themselves and their children
- exchange baby sitting chores to give each other opportunities to research data, visit the school, operate resource center

*From Betty Parker - School A, New York (8) - "Laundry List of parent activities."

- investigate funding sources among agencies outside of the immediate community.
- post shopping bargains for personal use and math lessons
- love their children/love the children

The Chicago Region of the DTA Project at the Center for New Schools is optimistic and confident about the involvement of District 21 parents in their children's education. They have begun a model that others should see and study as parental involvement becomes more and more, an answer to the educational problems of the minority urban student. They are not "stars" - they don't have to be, they are the rays of sunshine for the future. As Mbiti (1970) writes:

African concept of the family also includes the unborn members who are still in the loins of the living. They are the buds of hope and expectation, and each family makes sure that its own existence is not extinguished (p. 139-140).

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